JORDAN BAK, viola
Winner, 2019 Concert Artists Guild Competition

A String Around Autumn

Toru Takemitsu
(1930-1996)
A String Around Autumn
arr. for Viola and Piano by Toshio Hosokawa

Alvin Singleton
(b. 1940)
Argoru IV (1978)

Jessica Meyer
Excessive Use of Force (2020)

Quinn Mason
(b. 1996)
In Memory (2020)

Jeremy Mumford
(b. 1955)
wending (2001)

Astor Piazzolla
(1921-1992)
Le Grand Tango

Arnold Bax
(1883-1953)
Viola Sonata, GP 251
II. Allegro energico, ma non troppo presto

The idea behind this program is to showcase diversity, culture, and approach. Each piece is inspired in a different way by the culture that the composer grew up with or later became drawn to, as well as current events that may have impacted all of us. The Takemitsu unfurls, rather than kicking off the program, with a sonority of French-inspired Japanese character with hints of jazz. The following four pieces are centered around a historically unsung demographic - living, American, female, and BIPOC composers writing for the solo instrument. The Singleton is edgy, colorful, gruff, and virtuosic; the Meyer takes that edge and grit and evokes the jarring tragedy of police brutality across our nation. The Mason is a soliloquy sung ‘In Memory’ of the lives each of us lived before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Mumford breathes in a whole environment of sound, sometimes meditative, sometimes incredibly fervent. The Piazzolla grooves with Argentinian flavor, and the Bax offers a British impression of Irish humor, folk, and adventure. Total program length is 65 minutes.
For me, this program came out of the idea of solitude. There can be such intense power drawn from the feeling of being alone. The first half of the program consists of one single physical entity on stage, and while the second half is accompanied, the subject matter conveys the more emotional aspects of solitude. Opening with the Ligeti, a single voice singing a chant-like Hungarian melody, the program shifts to miniature, vivid scenes of being alone - the Kurtág “wailing song” mimicking the sound of actual human wailing, the Mason soliloquy of someone trapped at home in quarantine, and the Meyer portraying a person boarding a plane leaving a place they love - ending the first half with Biber’ s Passacaglia, a single repeated bass line that feels as if there is no end. H. Leslie Adams’ L’Extase D’Amour gives us a glimpse of what it might be like to be full of love; Britten’s Lachrymae, a clever variation-based character piece, is based on the cry of being forever without love. And finally, the program closes with the bleak, austere Adagio from the Shostakovich Viola Sonata, largely empty in texture with some outbursts, but an overwhelmingly real acceptance of loneliness at the end of one’s life. Total program length is 65 minutes.
Longing at Rest

Kaija Saariaho (b. 1952)  
*Du gick, flög*
  *for viola and mezzo-soprano alone*

Charles Martin Loeffler (1861-1935)  
Quatre poèmes for voice, viola & piano, Op. 5
II. Dansons la gigue
IV. Sérénade

Hermann Reutter (1900-1985)  
Antike Oden for voice, piano & viola, Op.57

Frank Bridge (1879-1941)  
Three Songs for medium voice, viola & piano

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)  
Zwei Gesähge, Op. 91

This program is a collaborative project for viola, mezzo-soprano and piano. The Saariaho, which I’ve premiered in 2019, is an excellent piece for viola and soprano alone that experiments with new and unusual sounds and also the space of the venue in the silences. The Loeffler warms up from the minimalist nature of the previous piece, offering folk and simplicty in the Gigue and the Serenade. The Reutter, not a well-known composer, shows a dramatic, 20th-century, pulse-oriented take on what can be written for the three partners, with energy and color. The Bridge shows expression through direction of harmonies that serve quite like a “bridge” back in time, from the Reutter back to the Brahms, one of the most beautiful gems that influenced so many works written for three musicians of this combination. Total program length is 53 minutes.